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PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND OPINIONS ABOUT PHYSICAL CHILD
ABUSE IN THE UNITED STATES.

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THE KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES, AND OPINIONS OF THE GENERAL
PUBLIC ON CHILD ABUSE AND RELATED ISSUES WERE INVESTIGATED
WITH A STANDARD, MULTI-STAGE AREA PROBABILITY SAMPLE OF
NON-INSTITUTIONAL UNITED STATES RESIDENTS 21 OR OLDER (1520
RESPONDENTS), IN A SURVEY DESIGNED BY BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY AND
CONDUCTED BY THE NATIONAL OPINION RESEARCH CENTER. A COMPUTER
PROGRAM SELECTED OPTIMAL EXPLANATORY VARIABLE COMBINATIONS
WITH INTRA-CLASS CORRELATION COEFFICIENT ESTIMATES.

THIRTY-ONE TABLES PRESENT VARIOUS RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS,
GENERAL PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE OF CHILD ABUSE, KNOWLEDGE OF
SPECIFIC INCIDENTS, KNOWLEDGE OF CHILD PROTECTIVE AGENCIES,
AWARENESS OF, AND PARTICIPATION IN, EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND
ACTIVITIES, VERBALIZED REACTIONS TO HEARSAY AND WITNESSED
ABUSE, PROPENSITY TOWARD CHILD ABUSE, OPINIONS ON PROTECTING
THE CHILD, METHODS OF TREATING THE PERPETRATOR, ALLOCATION OF
PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR HANDLING ABUSE CASES, AND THE
AMOUNT OF PUBLICITY TO BE GIVEN. AN ESTIMATE, WITH
RESERVATIONS, IS GIVEN FOR THE INCIDENCE OF CHILD ABUSE IN
THE UNITED STATES. CIRCUMSTANCES, EXTENT OF INJURIES, AND
RESULTING ACTION IN SPECIFIC INSTANCES ARE SUMMARIZED. (WR)

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BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY

THE FLORENCE HELLER GRADUATE SCHOOL FOR ADVANCED STUDIES IN SOCIAL WELFARE

**Public Knowledge, Attitudes and Opinions
About Physical Child Abuse
in the United States***

by

David G. Gil and John H. Noble

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION**

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Child abuse is a phenomenon with a history probably as long as that of mankind. And though some progress has been made in protecting the interests of children since earlier epochs when they were at times abandoned to die of exposure, legally bartered and sold, mutilated to enhance their pity-inciting appeal as beggars, or thrashed by school masters with ferules, rods, flappers and the cat-o'-nine-tails, the problem of child abuse has continued to be a cause for serious concern in the community.¹ Over the years that concern has been translated into legislative reform and child protective services and programs. Of late, there is indication that recent wide publicity of child abuse in the press and on TV and the efforts of the U.S. Children's Bureau to obtain uniform legislation governing child abuse reporting in each state may have heightened the general public's awareness and interest.² A comparison of incidents of child abuse reported in the press in 1962 and 1965 gives a rough idea of increased press coverage.

¹ See James H. Bossard and Eleanor S. Boll, The Sociology of Child Development (4th ed.; New York: Harper and Bros., 1966), pp. 491-509; Serapio R. Zalba, "The Abused Child: I. A Survey of the Problem," Social Work, Vol. 11, No. 4 (October, 1966), pp. 3-16; and Samuel X. Radbill, "A History of Child Abuse and Infanticide," in The Battered Child Syndrome, ed. Ray E. Helfer and C. Henry Kempe (Chicago: University of Chicago, forthcoming).

² See U.S. Children's Bureau, The Abused Child: Principles and Suggested Language For Legislation on Reporting of the Physically Abused Child (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1963). By June, 1967 every state had passed laws which require physicians and certain others to report suspected cases of child abuse and which free them from civil and criminal liability for doing so. Paulsen has commented that "few legislative proposals in the history of the United States have been so widely adopted in so little time." Monrad G. Paulsen, "Legal Protections Against Child Abuse," Children, Vol. 13, No. 2 (March-April, 1966), p. 46.

Six months coverage in 1965 produced almost as many incidents as one year of coverage in 1962.³

The literatures of medicine, psychiatry, psychology and social work reflect the level of interest and concern which might be expected of those dealing with child abuse on an everyday basis.⁴ It covers a broad sweep of territory. Medical treatises, editorials and alerts dominate. Social, psychological, and psychiatric interpretations, legal discussions, proposals and descriptions of preventive and protective service programs, and books, magazine and newspaper articles addressed to the broader public follow in descending order of frequency.⁵ But nowhere in the plethora of writing is there reference, beyond conjecture, to what knowledge, attitudes and opinions the general public may have about child abuse and related issues. To fill this gap, Brandeis University designed a survey of public knowledge, attitudes and opinions concerning child abuse in the United States.

³ See Vincent DeFrancis, Child Abuse--Preview of a Nationwide Survey (Denver: American Humane Association, 1963), and David G. Gil, "Incidence of Child Abuse and Demographic Characteristics of Persons Involved: Preliminary Observations," in The Battered Child Syndrome, ed. Ray E. Helfer and C. Henry Kempe (Chicago: University of Chicago, forthcoming). The 1962 American Humane Association 12 month survey uncovered 662 abused children, while the 1965 Brandeis University 6 month survey yielded 504 abused children.

Of course, increased incidence could account for some of the difference in the number of cases reported in 1962 and 1965. The issues of increased awareness and/or interest in child abuse and increased incidence are unalterably confounded here. We assume that newspapers are more responsive to heightened interest in the public than to increased incidence----an assumption which, though commonplace, may not do justice to the newspaper industry.

⁴ See U.S. Children's Bureau, Clearing House for Research in Child Life, Bibliography on the Battered Child (Washington, D.C., 1966)

⁵ The U.S. Children's Bureau Bibliography on the Battered Child, cited 186 books, articles, papers and on-going studies, of which 83 referred to medical treatises, editorials and alerts, 30 to social, psychological and psychiatric interpretations, 26 to legal discussions, 24 to proposals and descriptions of preventive and protective service programs, and 23 to books, magazine and newspaper articles addressed to the broader public.

The survey was administered by the National Opinion Research Center of the University of Chicago during October, 1965.

The survey of public knowledge, attitudes and opinions about child abuse was part of a broader program of research into the epidemiology of child abuse in the United States. As such, it shared the general orientation of the broader study and its conceptualization of the phenomenon of child abuse.⁶

Conceptually, child abuse is regarded as "non-accidental physical attack or physical injury, including minimal as well as fatal injury, inflicted upon children by persons caring for them."⁷ Provided it does not involve physical attack as a component, the definition excludes sexual abuse on the assumption that perpetrators of sexual attacks are differently motivated than perpetrators of physical attacks on children. Though conceptually comprehensible, the definition has certain shortcomings for purposes of operationalizing the phenomenon. Ambiguity about the meaning of "non-accidental" and about the exact line of demarcation between neglect and abuse make it difficult to describe and count real life situations. "Non-accidental" refers to a measure of deliberation in the behavior of persons physically attacking or injuring a child. Deliberate behavior includes not only acts of commission but also acts of omission, such as starvation which does not result from neglect or ignorance. Chance factors may still be present, however. For example, a blow may be fatal because the child strikes his head against an uncarpeted floor. Again, the possibility of

⁶See David G. Gil, "First Steps in a Nationwide Study of Child Abuse," (New York: National Conference on Social Welfare, 1966), Social Work Practice, 1966, pp. 61-78 for an overview and full statement of the goals and methods of the epidemiologic study.

⁷Ibid., p. 62.

"unconsciously" deliberate behavior further complicates the issue. Finally, the phrase "persons caring for them" refers to persons responsible for the care of the child at the time that the physical attack or injury took place.

Study Foci

The survey defined child abuse as an occurrence in which a caretaker, usually an adult, injures a child not by accident but in anger or deliberately.⁸ It sought, first, to ascertain public knowledge and opinions about the general problem of child abuse. Had anything been heard or read during the preceding year or ever? What were the sources of knowledge? What should be done with children abused by their caretakers? What should be done with the perpetrators of child abuse? Which agency should have primary responsibility for dealing with the whole problem of child abuse? What did the respondents think they would do if they learned about a child being abused in the neighborhood? What did the respondents think they would do if they happened to be present while a child was being abused?

The survey also assayed awareness of specific child abuse incidents during the preceding year, the sources of knowledge, and whether the respondents personally knew the families involved. By virtue of the nationally representative character of the sample, the latter piece of information seemed especially important for obtaining an estimate of the upper bound of yearly incidence of child abuse in the United States. The background

⁸More specifically, survey interviewers defined "child abuse" in the following way:

Now some questions about child abuse. I want to make clear exactly what I mean. Child abuse is when an adult physically injures a child, not by accident, but in anger or deliberately. Sometimes the person injuring the child is a parent, older brother or sister, or other relative. It could also be a babysitter, a teacher, or someone else who is not related to the child -- but it would always be someone who is at least temporarily taking care of the child.

characteristics, circumstances, and dispositions of the child and the perpetrator were obtained for incidents involving families of which the respondents had personal knowledge.

Knowledge of community resources and their use was another focus of study. Respondents were asked if they had ever heard about any educational programs or activities dealing with child abuse. What organizations sponsored them? Did they ever attend or participate in any of them? Did they know of any agencies which could be called upon specifically to protect children abused by their caretakers?

An attempt was made to assess how widespread the propensity to child abuse might be in the general population. A series of interrelated questions funneled the issue down to the individual respondent. Did the respondent think that anybody is capable of child abuse? Did he think that he might himself injure a child in his care someday? Was there ever a time when he could hardly refrain from abusing a child? Did he ever actually lose control and injure a child in his care?

Finally, the respondents were asked how much publicity child abuse should receive.

Method

The survey employed a standard multi-stage area probability sample of the total non-institutional population of the United States, twenty-one years old or older, to the block or segment level.⁹ At the block level, respondents were selected according to sex, age, race and employment status

⁹Married respondents under 21 years old were considered a part of this population and, accordingly, interviewed whenever encountered in the quota sampling.

quotas. The sample, consisting of 1520 respondents, had about the same efficiency as a simple random sample of 1,000 respondents.¹⁰

NORC interviewers administered an amalgam survey instrument which contained, besides the series of questions about child abuse, questions exploring respondents' knowledge and opinion about occupational roles, Negro-white relations, dental health practices, and property losses and/or victimization due to crime. General background information on the respondents themselves was also gathered. Whenever respondents cited personal knowledge of families in which an incident of child abuse had occurred during the previous year, NORC interviewers also administered a supplementary questionnaire designed to obtain information on the background of the families, the circumstances associated with the incident, and the dispositions of the abused child and perpetrator.

NORC staff edited, coded and transferred information from the completed questionnaires to IBM cards. They also computed for each question the frequency and percentage of the different responses by the 1520 respondents. Brandeis University staff subjected the data to additional

¹⁰In the simple binomial case, therefore, the observed percentages will have the following sampling errors:

<u>Observed Percentage</u>	<u>Estimated One Standard Error</u>
50%	1.6%
40 or 60	1.5
30 or 70	1.4
20 or 80	1.3
10 or 90	0.9
5 or 95	0.7

See National Opinion Research Center, "The Sample Design for NORC's Amalgam Surveys," undated memorandum issued by NORC, University of Chicago, p.4.
[Mimeographed.]

analyses in order to learn whether the respondents' marital status, parenthood, work status, education, religion, age, income, sex, race, and place of residence, singly or interacting, influenced their responses to the various questions.

A special computer program designed to select optimal combinations of explanatory variables was used in the analysis.¹² Taking into account all the possible combinations of a set of assigned independent variables and values on them, the program employs a nonsymmetric branching process, based on variance analytic techniques, to divide a sample into the series of subgroups which maximize prediction of values on the assigned dependent variable. The assumptions of linearity and additivity required in conventional multiple regression analysis are not necessary here. The assigned dependent variable, however, must be a continuous or equal-interval scale. Dichotomies are permissible as minimal equal-interval scales.¹³ In approaching the analytic task with the help of the Automatic Interaction Detector the usual question, "What is the effect of x on y when everything else is held constant?" is replaced with the more comprehensive question: "What do I need to know most in order to reduce predictive error maximally?" Or stated otherwise, "What configurations of values of assigned independent variables are associated with specified values of the assigned dependent variables?" The latter questions seem more appropriate than the former when theory is not precise about the relationships between variables and when exact hypotheses are not being tested. This is oftentimes the situation in survey research.

¹² See John A. Sonquist and James N. Morgan, The Detection of Interaction Effects: A Report on a Computer Program for the Selection of Optimal Combinations of Explanatory Variables, Monograph No. 35 (Ann Arbor: Survey Research Center, University of Michigan, 1964).

¹³ Ibid., p. 2.

Finally, an estimate of the intra-class correlation coefficient ($\text{est.}(\omega)^2$) was computed for the subgroups isolated by the Automatic Interaction Detector.¹⁴ The intra-class correlation coefficient shows the amount by which predictive error has been reduced. That is, how much the resultant subgroups explain beyond simple reference to the distribution of responses for the sample as a whole. The coefficient thus permits judgment about the power of the set of respondent background variables, singly or interacting, to explain differences in response to the survey questions. In this regard, an initial restriction was placed upon the operation of the Automatic Interaction Detector to insure that the sample would not be divided unless the reduction in predictive error was at least one percent.

Respondent Characteristics

The 1520 respondents were 48.5 percent male and 51.5 percent female. They were 85.7 percent white, 13.4 percent Negro, .3 percent Oriental, and .7 percent other races. About 70 percent were Protestant, 25.9 percent Roman Catholic, 2 percent Jewish, .8 percent other, and 2.8 percent had no religious preference. With respect to age, about 11 percent were under 25, 45.9 percent between 26 and 45, 16.5 percent between 46 and 55, 12.7 percent between 56 and 65, and 14.3 percent over 65. Less than .3 percent of the respondents had no formal education. Twenty-two percent had attended school eight years or less, 21.1 percent some high school, 43.7 percent high school and some college, 6.5 percent college, and 6.5 percent graduate or professional school.

¹⁴See William L. Hays, Statistics for Psychologists (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1963, pp. 381-384.)

About 81 percent of the respondents were married at the time of the survey, 7.7 percent widowed, 2.8 percent divorced, 1.7 percent separated, and 7.2 percent single, never married. Roughly 12 percent of the married respondents had no children. Of those who had children, 73.8 percent had from one to four, 11.9 percent from 5 to 7, and 2 percent 8 or more.

Fifty-one percent of the respondents were working full or part-time, 3.1 percent were temporarily out of work because of illness, vacation, strike, etc., 1.1 percent unemployed, looking for work, 10.9 percent retired, 31.7 percent at home keeping house, and 1.6 percent in school or otherwise occupied. About 15 percent of the respondents who had ever worked were professional or technical workers, 4.9 percent owners or managers of farms or ranches, 8 percent managers, officials or proprietors, 19.1 percent clerical workers, 6.3 percent sales workers, 13.3 percent craftsmen and foremen, 15.9 percent machine operators, 12.6 percent service workers occupied outside of households, and 4.6 percent laborers. There were no farm or mine laborers and foremen in the sample.

Gross family income ranged from under \$2,000 to over \$15,000. About 11 percent of the respondents had gross family incomes of under \$2,000, 18.6 percent from \$2,000 to \$3,999, 20.2 percent from \$4,000 to \$5,999, 19 percent from \$6,000 to \$7,999, 24.7 percent from \$8,000 to \$9,999, 13.5 percent from \$10,000 to \$14,999, and 6.2 percent \$15,000 or more.

Forty-one percent of the respondents lived in smaller metropolitan areas, 24.3 percent in major metropolitan areas, 15.9 percent in counties with a town of 10,000 to 49,999 population, and 18.7 percent in counties

with no town of 10,000.¹⁵ Their distribution over the nine U.S. Census Bureau defined geographic areas of the United States approximated the percentages projected for 1965.

NORC interviewers rated 83.9 percent of the respondents very cooperative when interviewed, 15.1 percent somewhat cooperative, and 1.1 percent non-cooperative. Fifty-eight percent were rated very interested in the topics about which they were questioned, 38.5 percent somewhat interested, and 3.5 percent uninterested.

Knowledge of the General Problem

As indicated by Table 1, over 80 percent of the people in the United States had recent knowledge of the general problem of child abuse. Only 17.4 percent of the respondents had not heard or read about the problem during the year preceding the survey. Further analysis disclosed, not unexpectedly, that education, place of residence and parenthood interacted to influence knowledgeability. Table 2 shows that respondents with greater than high school educations were 93 percent knowledgeable.¹⁷ Parents living in

¹⁵ For sampling purposes NORC refined the U.S. Census Bureau definition of Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area. Under the refinement a major metropolitan area consists of a SMSA with a total population of 2 million or more. A smaller metropolitan area consists of a SMSA with less than 2 million total population. See U.S. Census Bureau, County and City Data Book, 1962 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1962), pp. xi-xii for the official definition of Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area.

¹⁷ Tables presenting the results of analysis by the Automatic Interaction Detector show finally defined subgroups, the number of respondents falling within each subgroup, and the percentage within each subgroup adhering to an affirmative response. Originally, responses to questions were coded dichotomously as 1 = "Yes" and 2 = "No." The Automatic Interaction Detector presented the means and standard deviations of the finally defined subgroups. The means of dichotomous variables, coded 1 = "Yes" and 2 = "No," are easily converted into percentages as illustrated by the following example: A mean of 1.07 equals 7 percent "No" or 93 percent "Yes."

TABLE 1

RESPONDENTS' KNOWLEDGE DURING PAST YEAR*
OF THE GENERAL PROBLEM OF CHILD ABUSE

<u>Knowledge</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Had heard or read of problem during past year	1254	82.6
Had not heard or read of problem during past year	<u>265</u>	<u>17.4</u>
Total	1519**	100.0

*October 1964 to September 1965.

**Excluding 1 (.1%) respondent who did not answer.

TABLE 2

PREDICTORS OF RESPONDENTS' KNOWLEDGE DURING PAST YEAR
OF THE GENERAL PROBLEM OF CHILD ABUSE

<u>Group</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Percentage Who Had Knowledge</u>
1. Greater than high school education	436	93.0
2. High school education or less, metropolitan areas, parent	559	85.0
3. High school education, non-metropolitan areas	150	81.0
4. High school education or less, metropolitan areas, non-parent	120	69.0
5. Less than high school education, non-metropolitan areas	255	66.0

est. $\omega^2 = .063$

metropolitan areas with high school educations or less were second in knowledgeability (85 percent). Persons living in non-metropolitan areas with high school educations followed closely in third place (81 percent). Respondents without children living in metropolitan areas with high school educations or less were next to last in knowledgeability (69 percent). And respondents living in non-metropolitan areas with less than high school educations were least knowledgeable (66 percent). The estimated intra-class correlation coefficient (est. ω^2) indicated that predictive error was reduced by 6.3 percent---a relatively small amount. Respondent background variables, then, were not very powerful in explaining differences in knowledgeability.

Of the respondents who had not heard or read anything about the general problem of child abuse during the year preceding the survey, Table 3 shows that 58.6 percent had heard or read about it sometime in the past. Taking into account all who had ever heard or read about child abuse, one can conclude that very few people in the United States are unaware of the general problem.

Table 4 shows from what sources respondents obtained their knowledge of the general problem of child abuse. Many respondents had more than one source of knowledge. Clearly, most people learned of child abuse through newspapers (72 percent) and radio and TV (56.2 percent). Less frequently cited were magazine articles (22.7 percent) and conversations with friends, neighbors, colleagues, etc. (21 percent). Medical sources provided information only 5.2 percent of the time. Churches and synagogues, schools and the PTA, clubs and organizations, and professional associations, etc. were infrequent sources of information.

TABLE 3

PREVIOUS KNOWLEDGE OF CHILD ABUSE AMONG RESPONDENTS
WHO HAD NOT HEARD OR READ ABOUT IT
DURING THE PAST YEAR

<u>Knowledge</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Had heard or read of child abuse sometime in past	150	58.6
Had never heard or read of child abuse sometime in past	106	41.4
Total	256*	100.0

*Excluding 1264 (83.2%) respondents, for 1255 of whom the question did not apply and 9 who did not answer.

TABLE 4

SOURCE OF RESPONDENTS' KNOWLEDGE DURING PAST YEAR
OF GENERAL PROBLEM OF CHILD ABUSE

<u>Source</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Percent of Total Sample*</u>
Newspapers	1094	72.0
Radio, television	854	56.2
Magazines	345	22.7
Conversation with friends, neighbors, colleagues or others	320	21.0
Doctors or nurses or other medical per- sonnel in a hospital or medical office	79	5.2
Churches or synagogues	58	3.8
Teachers or other school personnel, or PTA	52	3.4
Clubs or organizations	37	2.4
Professional associations	36	2.4
Others	<u>31</u>	<u>2.0</u>

*1520 respondents.

Knowledge of Specific Incidents

As indicated by Table 5, 78.7 percent of the U.S. population had recent knowledge of one or more specific incidents of child abuse. They had heard or read of incidents during the year preceding the survey. Education and geographic place of residence interacted to influence knowledgeability. Table 6 shows that 87 percent of respondents living in the East North Central, West South Central and Pacific geographic regions had recent knowledge of a specific incident of child abuse. Those living in the rest of the United States with at least high school educations were 81 percent knowledgeable, while those with less than high school educations in the same region were least knowledgeable (64 percent). There is no apparent reason why persons living in the East North Central, West South Central and Pacific geographic regions should have greater knowledgeability than the rest of the nation, irrespective of education. Again, the estimated intra-class correlation coefficient indicates that respondent background variables account for a relatively small reduction in predictive error (5.2 percent).

As shown by Table 7, the major sources of knowledge were newspapers (69 percent) and radio and TV (48.4 percent). Conversations with friends, neighbors and colleagues, etc. and magazine articles were next in frequency---each about 12 percent. Medical sources provided information 3.2 percent of the time. Schools and the PTA, churches and synagogues, professional associations and clubs and organizations, etc. were each cited as sources less than 2 percent of the time.

Knowledge of Child Protective Agencies

The population of the United States is divided equally in knowledge of child protective agencies in the community. Table 8 indicates that 50.4 percent of the respondents knew of child protective agencies in their com-

TABLE 5

RESPONDENTS' KNOWLEDGE OF SPECIFIC INCIDENTS
OF CHILD ABUSE DURING THE PAST YEAR

<u>Knowledge</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Aware	1197	78.7
Not aware	<u>323</u>	<u>21.2</u>
Total	1520	100.0

TABLE 6

PREDICTORS OF RESPONDENTS WHO HAD HEARD OR READ
ABOUT SPECIFIC INCIDENTS OF CHILD ABUSE

<u>Group</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Percentage Who Had Heard or Read</u>
1. East North Central, West South Central and Pacific geographic regions	638	87.0
2. Rest of U.S. geographic regions, at least high school education	475	81.0
3. Rest of U.S. geographic regions, less than high school education	407	64.0

est. $\omega^2 = .052$

TABLE 7

SOURCES OF RESPONDENTS' KNOWLEDGE OF SPECIFIC
CHILD ABUSE INCIDENTS DURING PAST YEAR

<u>Source</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Percent of Total Sample*</u>
Newspapers	1049	69.0
Radio or television	735	48.4
Conversation with friends, neighbors, colleagues or others	192	12.6
Magazines	188	12.4
Doctors, nurses, or other personnel in a hospital or medical office	49	3.2
Other sources	28	1.8
Teachers or other school personnel, or PTA	24	1.6
Churches or synagogues	24	1.6
Professional associations	12	.8
Clubs or organizations	<u>11</u>	<u>.7</u>

*1520 respondents.

TABLE 8

RESPONDENTS' KNOWLEDGE OF CHILD PROTECTIVE AGENCIES IN THE COMMUNITY

<u>Knowledge</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Aware	765	50.4
Not aware	<u>753</u>	<u>49.6</u>
Total	1518*	100.0

*Excluding 2 (.1%) respondents who did not answer.

TABLE 9

PREDICTORS OF RESPONDENTS' KNOWLEDGE OF CHILD PROTECTIVE AGENCIES IN COMMUNITY

<u>Group</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Percentage Who Had Knowledge</u>
1. Non-major metropolitan areas, greater than high school education	303	66.0
2. Non-major metropolitan areas, high school or less education	848	50.0
3. Major metropolitan areas	369	38.0

est. $\omega^2 = .033$

munities and 49.6 percent did not. As shown by Table 9, place of residence and education interacted to influence knowledgeability. Sixty-six percent of respondents living outside of major metropolitan areas with higher education knew of child protective agencies. Those living outside of major metropolitan areas with high school educations or less were 50 percent knowledgeable. Dwellers in major metropolitan areas were least knowledgeable (38 percent). Again, the estimated intra-class correlation coefficient indicated that reference to respondent background variables yields a relatively small reduction in predictive error (3.3 percent). It is noteworthy, nevertheless, that people living in major metropolitan areas are less aware of the child protective agencies in their midst. Child protective agencies appear less visible in areas with heavy concentrations of population than they do in other areas. By the same token, persons with higher education living outside of major metropolitan areas are more aware of agencies within their communities than those with less education. Apparently, education becomes the critical factor in the explanation of increased knowledgeability once population density is reduced.

Knowledge and Participation in Educational Programs and Activities

Most people in the United States, as Table 10 reveals, were not aware of the various educational programs and activities dealing with child abuse which occur from time to time in the community. Only 21.3 percent of the respondents were aware of them. None of the respondent background variables, singly or interacting, reduced error in predicting knowledgeability in this regard.

Table 11 indicates the types of educational programs and activities of which the respondents were aware. Some respondents knew of more than one type. Five and one-half percent of the respondents knew of programs and activities but could not specify the type. Wherever they could specify,

TABLE 10.

RESPONDENTS' KNOWLEDGE OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS
OR ACTIVITIES DEALING WITH CHILD ABUSE

<u>Knowledge</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Aware	324	21.3
Not aware	<u>1195</u>	<u>78.7</u>
Total	1519*	100.0

*Excluding 1 (.1%) respondent who did not answer.

TABLE 11

TYPES OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS OR ACTIVITIES
DEALING WITH CHILD ABUSE OF WHICH
RESPONDENTS WERE AWARE

Type	No.	Percent of Total Sample*
Did not know	84	5.5
TV	80	5.3
Social service agency	62	4.1
School, PTA	46	3.0
Church, synagogue	39	2.6
Hospital, clinic, medical organization	33	2.2
Mental health clinic, child guidance clinic	32	2.1
Other sources	27	1.8
Professional organization	18	1.2
Club or organization	15	1.0
Neighborhood center, settlement house, YMCA	8	.5
Labor union	2	.1

*1520 respondents.

TABLE 12

TIME OF RESPONDENTS' PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS
OR ACTIVITIES DEALING WITH CHILD ABUSE

<u>Time</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Percent of Total Sample**</u>
During the past year	22	1.4
Prior to past year	22	1.4
Both during past year and prior	<u>6</u>	<u>.4</u>
Total	50*	3.2

*Respondents who had both heard of educational programs or activities concerning child abuse and had taken part in them.

**1520 respondents.

TV programs were most often cited (5.3 percent). Social service agency programs were second (4.1 percent), school and PTA sponsored programs and activities, third (3 percent), followed closely by church and synagogue programs (2.6 percent). Less frequently mentioned were programs sponsored by medical organizations, mental health and child guidance clinics, professional organizations, clubs, neighborhood centers and settlement houses, labor unions, etc.

Only 3.2 percent of the respondents had ever participated in programs and activities dealing with child abuse. Participation, as Table 12 reveals, took place during the year preceding the survey 1.4 percent of the time, prior to the year preceding the survey 1.4 percent of the time, and during both intervals .4 percent of the time.

If sponsors of educational programs and activities dealing with child abuse were aiming at a broad segment of the U.S. population, one can conclude their efforts have been almost 25 percent effective as far as gaining recognition for their efforts is concerned, but only 3.2 percent effective as far as participation is concerned. Depending upon population need and/or impact of the educational programs and activities, this may be a good or poor showing. Moreover, some programs on radio and TV may have an educational impact unbeknownst to listeners and viewers. Comparison of Tables 5 and 12 tends to confirm the suspicion. Whereas 56.2 percent of the respondents cited radio and TV as the source of their knowledge about the general problem of child abuse, only 5.3 percent identified radio and TV as the type of educational program to which they had been exposed. On the other hand, the percentages specifying other types of educational programs and activities and other sources of information about the general problem of child abuse are more nearly compatible.

Reactions to Child Abuse in the Neighborhood

Table 13 shows that only 13.7 percent of the respondents thought they would talk directly with the child's family upon learning that the child had been abused. On the other hand, they were not loath to get involved indirectly. Almost 47 percent indicated their willingness to notify the local welfare agency and 23.6 percent the police. About 9 percent of the respondents thought they would discuss with neighbors what steps to take. Only 7.1 percent thought they would keep out of the matter, having no business mixing in other people's affairs whatsoever.

Additional analyses disclosed that race and education somewhat influence how respondents thought they would react to knowledge of child abuse in the neighborhood. Table 14 shows that 32 percent of non-white respondents endorsed talking directly with the child's family, while only 11 percent of the white respondents would consider direct intervention. But, again, the reduction in predictive error was small (4.7 percent). Speculation on why non-white more than white respondents tend to endorse talking directly to the abused child's family can take alternate paths. Non-white communities may be more cohesive than white communities and so wish to exclude "outsiders" from their affairs. This cohesiveness may include a strong sense of responsibility for happenings in the neighborhood. Or, non-white communities may distrust white officialdom specifically and so eschew help from white dominated welfare agencies and the police. In either case, avoidance of outside authority seems evident.

Table 15 reveals that 52 percent of those having at least high school educations endorsed calling the welfare department upon learning that a child in the neighborhood had been abused in contrast to 37 percent of those with less than high school educations. Here the reduction in predictive error

TABLE 13

HOW RESPONDENTS THOUGHT THEY WOULD REACT
UPON LEARNING THAT A CHILD IN THE
NEIGHBORHOOD HAD BEEN ABUSED

<u>Reaction</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Would talk directly with the child's family	207	13.7
Would discuss it with neighbors to decide what steps to take	132	8.7
Would not get involved with family or neighbors but would notify police	357	23.6
Would not get involved with family or neighbors but would notify local welfare agency	690	45.6
Would keep out of it, having no business mixing in other people's affairs	107	7.1
Did not know	<u>19</u>	<u>1.3</u>
Total	1512*	100.0

*Excluding 8 (.5%) respondents who did not answer.

TABLE 14.

PREDICTORS OF RESPONDENTS' ENDORSEMENT OF TALKING
DIRECTLY WITH CHILD'S FAMILY UPON LEARNING
THAT THE CHILD HAD BEEN ABUSED

<u>Group</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Percentage Endorsing</u>
1. Non-white	217	32.0
2. White	1303	11.0

est. $\omega^2 = .047$

TABLE 15

PREDICTORS OF RESPONDENTS' ENDORSEMENT OF CALLING WELFARE
DEPARTMENT UPON LEARNING THAT A CHILD IN THE
NEIGHBORHOOD HAD BEEN ABUSED

<u>Group</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Percentage Endorsing</u>
1. At least high school education	862	52.0
2. Less than high school education	658	37.0

est. $\omega^2 = .020$

was 2 percent. Calling the police could not be predicted by reference to any of the respondent background variables.

Reactions to Witnessed Child Abuse

While respondents were reluctant to take direct action upon hearsay report of abuse in the neighborhood, the contingency of witnessed child abuse evoked a very different response. Table 16 indicates that 76.7 percent of the respondents thought they would try somehow to stop the abuse and protect the child from being injured. Roughly 20 percent would not themselves interfere but would call the police or a welfare agency. Only 2.8 percent of the respondents thought witnessed child abuse was none of their business. Table 17 reveals that 79 percent of respondents under 65 years old thought they would try to stop the perpetrator if present while a child was being abused. Sixty percent of respondents over 65 years old thought they would intervene in a like manner. Though the 2.5 percent reduction in predictive error is relatively small, it does reflect the realistic constraint that age has upon people getting into a fracas over any issue. The fact that 60 percent of the respondents over 65 years old would risk possible physical injury in coming to the rescue of a child they saw being abused is itself noteworthy. Of course, one must remember that the "fit" between stated reaction and actual behavior in face of a witnessed event such as child abuse is not known here. Therefore, one must be cautious in translating the stated reactions of the respondents into conclusions about what they would actually do if they stumbled upon some perpetrator abusing a child.

Propensity to Child Abuse

As revealed by Table 18, well over half (58.3 percent) of the respondents thought anybody could at some time injure a child in his care. About

TABLE 16

HOW RESPONDENTS THOUGHT THEY WOULD REACT
IF PRESENT WHILE A CHILD
WAS BEING ABUSED

<u>Reaction</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Would try to stop person somehow and protect child from being injured	1157	76.7
Would not interfere but would call police	181	12.0
Would not interfere but would call local welfare agency	115	7.6
Would keep out of it, having no business mixing in other people's affairs	42	2.8
Did not know	14	.9
Total	1509*	100.0

*Excluding 11 (.7%) respondents who did not answer.

TABLE 17

PREDICTORS OF RESPONDENTS' ENDORSEMENT OF TRYING TO
STOP PERPETRATOR IF PRESENT WHILE A
CHILD IS BEING ABUSED

<u>Group</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Percentage Endorsing</u>
1. Under 65 years of age	1304	79.0
2. Over 65 years of age	216	60.0

est. $\omega^2 = .025$

TABLE 18

RESPONDENT OPINION ON THE PROPENSITY TO CHILD
ABUSE IN THE POPULATION AT LARGE

<u>Opinion</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Almost anybody could at some time injure a child in his care	884	58.3
Not everybody is capable of injuring a child in his care	592	39.1
Did not know	<u>40</u>	<u>2.6</u>
Total	1516*	100.0

*Excluding 4 (.3%) respondents who did not answer.

39 percent held the opposite opinion, and 2.6 percent could not say. Table 19 shows how the question of propensity aimed directly at the respondents caused an abrupt drop in estimate. In contrast to the 58.3 percent who thought anybody could at some time injure a child in his care, only 22.3 percent thought themselves capable. Age and sex interacted to influence respondents' admission of capacity for child abuse. Table 20 indicates that males, 55 years old or younger, were most prone to admit capacity (34 percent). In the same age range, only 20 percent of the females admitted capacity. Least willing to admit capacity, irrespective of sex, were respondents over 55 years of age (12 percent). Reference to these respondent background variables reduced predictive error 4.5 percent.

Table 21 shows still fewer respondents who admitted coming very close to injuring a child in their care---15.9 percent. Finally, Table 22 reveals that only 6 of the 242 respondents admitting proximity to child abuse stated they had actually injured a child in their care. The six constituted .4 percent of the total sample of 1520 respondents.

It is not surprising that the respondents more and more severed connection between themselves and the phenomenon of child abuse as the questions brought it closer to home. By the same token, that six respondents could admit child abuse to a complete stranger in the person of a survey interviewer is striking. One could speculate how respondents over 55 years old, well insulated from the pressures of child rearing, could think themselves immune from the temptation. Similarly, younger females might possess an idealized image of themselves in their sex role and so find it hard to admit capacity for child abuse. On the other hand, males may not tolerate children as well as females and so admit greater capacity for acting out abusive impulses.

TABLE 19

RESPONDENT OPINION ON THEIR OWN
PROPENSITY TO CHILD ABUSE

<u>Opinion</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Respondent thought he could at some time injure a child	338	22.3
Respondent thought he could never injure a child	1141	75.2
Did not know	<u>39</u>	<u>2.6</u>
Total	1518*	100.0

*Excluding 2 (.1%) respondents who did not answer.

TABLE 20

PREDICTORS OF RESPONDENTS' ADMISSION OF CAPACITY
FOR CHILD ABUSE

<u>Group</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Percentage Admitting Capacity</u>
1. 55 years of age or under, male	508	34.0
2. 55 years of age or under, female	599	20.0
3. Over 55 years of age	413	12.0

est. $\omega^2 = .045$

"

TABLE 21

HOW CLOSE RESPONDENTS CAME
TO CHILD ABUSE

<u>Proximity</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Respondent at one time could hardly refrain from injuring a child in his care	242	15.9
Respondent never came close to injuring a child in his care	<u>1276</u>	<u>84.1</u>
Total	1518*	100.0

*Excluding 2 (.1%) respondents who did not answer.

TABLE 22

REPORTED INCIDENCE OF CHILD ABUSE AMONG
RESPONDENTS ADMITTING PROXIMITY

<u>Incidence</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Respondent admitted injuring a child	6	2.5**
Respondent denied ever injuring a child	<u>235</u>	<u>97.5</u>
Total	241*	100.0

*Excluding 1 (.4%) of the 242 respondents admitting proximity to
child abuse.

**.4% of total sample of 1520.

Protecting the Abused Child

Though hearsay report of child abuse in the neighborhood would not move many respondents to direct intervention, an immediately witnessed incident would. But to learn what respondents thought should be done to protect the abused child from further harm, they were asked what they thought should be done by the authorities. Table 23 indicates that a simple majority of respondents (53.9 percent) thought the abused child should be removed from his home only as a last resort. The parent or other responsible person caring for the child should be given a second chance and be supervised and helped to improve. On the other hand, another substantial group, consisting of 36 percent of the respondents, thought the child should be removed from the care of the person who caused injury the first time it happened. Eight percent of the respondents were more discriminating in their response. They thought the situation should be evaluated, and if it seemed unlikely that the person who injured the child would do it again, the child might be left in his care. Two percent of the respondents either subscribed to none of these opinions or had none.

Table 24 shows that education and sex interacted to influence recommendation of the more radical solution of removing the abused child from the care of the person responsible the first time abuse occurred. Fifty-two percent of the females with less than high school educations subscribed to this solution in contrast to thirty-six percent of the males at the same educational level. Only thirty percent of respondents with high school educations or more thought that removing the abused child was a good idea. Predictive error was reduced 3 percent by reference to the interaction of education and sex.

TABLE 23

WHAT RESPONDENTS THOUGHT SHOULD BE
DONE ABOUT AN ABUSED CHILD

<u>Disposition</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Child should be removed from care of person who caused injury the first time incident happens	535	36.0
Child should be removed from home only as last resort. Parent or other caring for child should be given "second chance" and should be supervised and helped to improve care of child	801	53.9
If it seems unlikely that person who injured child would do it again, it's OK to leave child in his or her care	119	8.0
None of these	20	1.3
Did not know	10	.7
Total	1485*	100.0

*Excluding 35 (2.3%) respondents who did not answer.

TABLE 24

PREDICTORS OF RESPONDENTS' ENDORSEMENT OF REMOVING THE ABUSED CHILD FROM THE CARE OF THE PERSON RESPONSIBLE THE FIRST TIME ABUSE OCCURS

<u>Group</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Percentage Endorsing</u>
1. Less than high school education, female	313	52.0
2. Less than high school education, male	345	36.0
3. At least high school education	862	30.0

Est. $\omega^2 = .030$

Treating the Perpetrator

When asked what should be done about perpetrators of child abuse, respondents were largely sympathetic. Table 25 indicates that 66.4 percent of the respondents thought perpetrators of child abuse should be closely supervised and treated rather than punished. Roughly 4.5 percent thought perpetrators should be left alone if the injury inflicted upon the child was not serious. Twenty-seven percent took a punitive stance, however. They thought perpetrators should be jailed or punished in some way or other. About two percent of the respondents either rejected these opinions or had none.

Further analysis revealed respondents favoring supervision and treatment could be differentiated from the rest on the basis of education. Table 26 shows that respondents with at least high school educations were 76 percent in favor of treatment, while those with less than high school educations were 54 percent in favor. The reduction in predictive error was 4.8 percent. None of the respondent background variables allowed prediction of the punitive stance toward perpetrators of child abuse.

Where to Place Primary Responsibility

Respondents were asked where they thought primary responsibility for handling child abuse cases should be lodged. As shown by Table 27, 54.9 percent of the respondents thought the responsibility should be placed in social welfare agencies, 22.7 percent in law enforcement agencies, and 14 percent in health agencies. Six percent of the respondents thought responsibility should reside in one or more combinations of these agencies. About 2 percent either suggested some other type of agency than welfare, law enforcement or health or couldn't offer an opinion.

TABLE 25

WHAT RESPONDENTS THOUGHT SHOULD BE
DONE ABOUT PERPETRATORS OF
CHILD ABUSE

<u>Disposition</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Such parents or other persons should be jailed or punished in some other way	409	27.1
Such parents or other persons must be closely supervised and treated rather than punished	1003	66.4
Such parents or other persons should be left alone if the injury is not too serious	66	4.4
None of these	22	1.5
Did not know	11	.7
Total	1511*	100.0

*Excluding 9 (.6%) respondents who did not answer.

TABLE 26

PREDICTORS OF RESPONDENTS' ENDORSEMENT OF PROVIDING CLOSE SUPERVISION AND TREATMENT FOR PERPETRATORS OF CHILD ABUSE

<u>Group</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Percentage Endorsing</u>
1. At least high school education	862	76.0
2. Less than high school education	658	54.0

$$\text{est. } (\omega)^2 = .048$$

TABLE 27

TYPE OF AGENCY WITHIN WHICH RESPONDENTS
THOUGHT PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR CHILD
ABUSE CASES SHOULD BE LODGED

Type	No.	Percent
Law enforcement	345	22.7
Social welfare	833	54.9
Health	212	14.0
Single others	28	1.8
Any combination	91	6.0
Did not know	— 8	— .5
Total	1517*	100.0

*Excluding 3 (.2%) respondents who did not answer.

TABLE 28

PREDICTORS OF RESPONDENTS' ENDORSEMENT OF WELFARE DEPARTMENT
AS AGENCY WHICH SHOULD HAVE PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY
FOR DEALING WITH CHILD ABUSE

Group	No.	Percentage Endorsing
1. Metropolitan and/or non-metropolitan areas with cities having over 10,000 population	1235	57.0
2. Non-metropolitan areas with cities having under 10,000 population	285	45.0

est. $\omega^2 = .009$

Table 28 indicates that 57 percent of respondents living in metropolitan and/or non-metropolitan areas with cities having over 10,000 population would make the welfare department responsible for dealing with child abuse in contrast to 45 percent of those living in non-metropolitan areas with cities under 10,000 population. The difference in response between the two groups is 12 percent and reduces predictive error slightly less than one percent. Availability of social agencies to provide child protective services in metropolitan areas and their environs probably contributed to the pattern of responses ascertained.

How Much Publicity

Respondents were asked how much publicity they thought child abuse should receive. On the assumption that response to the question may provide an indication of the extent of concern, Table 29 reveals that 30.1 percent of the population at the time of the survey was very concerned. They thought child abuse should receive a lot of publicity. Another 44 percent thought it should receive some publicity---an indication of moderate concern. Roughly 22 percent, on the other hand, thought the subject should be kept quiet. About 4 percent could offer no opinion.

Table 30 indicates that 79 percent of the respondents 45 years old or younger favored giving child abuse at least some publicity in contrast to 68 percent of the respondents over 45 years old. Predictive error was reduced 1.3 percent.

The Upper Bound of Child Abuse in the United States

When asked whether they had personal knowledge of families within which an incident of child abuse had occurred during the year preceding the survey, 45 respondents or 3 percent of the sample replied affirmatively.

Table 31 presents this finding in tabular form. Insofar as the sample was

TABLE 29

AMOUNT OF PUBLICITY WHICH RESPONDENTS THOUGHT
CHILD ABUSE INCIDENTS SHOULD RECEIVE

<u>Amount</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Percent</u>
A lot of publicity	457	30.1
Some publicity	669	44.0
Kept quiet	337	22.2
Did not know	<u>56</u>	<u>3.7</u>
Total	1519*	100.0

*Excluding 1 (.1%) respondent who did not answer.

TABLE 30

PREDICTORS OF OPINION THAT CHILD ABUSE SHOULD
GET PUBLICITY, NOT BE KEPT QUIET

<u>Group</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Percentage Holding Opinion</u>
1. Forty-five years of age or under	857	79.0
2. Over forty-five years of age	663	68.0

est. $\omega^2 = .013$

TABLE 31

RESPONDENTS' PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE OF FAMILIES WITHIN
WHICH A CHILD ABUSE INCIDENT OCCURRED
DURING PAST YEAR

<u>Knowledge</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Percent of Total Sample**</u>
Had personal knowledge of families involved	45	3.0
Did not personally know families involved	<u>1150</u>	<u>97.0</u>
Total	1195*	100.0

*Excluding 325 (21.4%) respondents, for 323 of whom the question did not apply and 2 who did not answer.

**1520 respondents.

representative of the 110,000,000 adults, 21 years of age and older in the United States, it is possible to extrapolate the 3 percent within a known margin of error to obtain an estimate of the number of adults in the U.S. who knew of an incident of child abuse during the year preceding the survey. Since the margin of error at the 95 percent confidence level was less than .7 percent, that number must lie somewhere between 2.3 percent and 3.7 percent of the 110,000,000 adults, that is, between 2.53 and 4.07 million adults. On the assumption that each of these adults knew a different family in which child abuse had occurred, the number of families in which child abuse had occurred during the year preceding the survey would equal the number of adults having personal knowledge of such families. And in that case an estimate of the upper bound of child abuse in the U.S. per year would equal the number of adults having personal knowledge of the families involved---between 2.53 and 4.07 millions, or 13.3 to 21.4 incidents per 1000 population.

But the assumption upon which this estimate is based is unrealistic. Extrapolation does not take into account the great likelihood that some of the 2.53 to 4.07 million adults who personally knew families involved in child abuse might know the same families. In setting the upper bound of child abuse in the U.S., therefore, the figures obtained in the survey should be used cautiously and conservatively. Accordingly, the hypothesis that yearly incidence of child abuse in the U.S. is considerably lower than the upper bound derived from respondents' personal knowledge of specific incidents seems warranted. Again, one should remember that the method employed was indirect and its reliability and validity unknown. The estimate was not based upon incidents to which the respondents confessed complicity, but upon the number of incidents they reported occurring in other people's families. The estimate of incidence would be much lower

if it were based upon child abuse to which respondents confessed---6 or .4 percent of the sample of 1520 respondents. Of course, this figure is undoubtedly depressed because people are understandably reluctant to admit to behavior considered socially unacceptable or illegal. And as a final caveat, one should remember that the estimated upper bound of yearly incidence refers to child abuse in its full range of severity---from the most superficial injury to fatality. And fatalities constitute a very small portion of total incidence.¹⁸

Characteristics of the Abused Children and Their Families

The 45 respondents who said they had personal knowledge of families within which child abuse had occurred during the year preceding the survey gave some information, albeit indirect and subject to the vagaries of perception and memory, about the characteristics of the abused children and their families. Forty-eight children in 48 families were known to the 45 respondents. They were 54 percent male and 44 percent female---the sex of the remaining 2 percent was not reported. They ranged in age from under 6 months to over 12 years: 2 percent under 6 months, 6 percent 6 to under 12 months, 12.5 percent 1 to under 2 years, 8 percent 2 to under 3 years, 14.6 percent 3 to under 5 years, 31 percent 5 to under 10 years, 10 percent 10 to under 12 years, and 14.6 percent 12 years or more. Seventy-five percent of the children were white, 4.2 percent Negro, and 2 percent American Indian. The race of the remaining 19 percent was unknown.

¹⁸ A pilot study of reported incidence of child abuse in California for the 5 month period September 17, 1965 to February 16, 1966 uncovered approximately 489 physically abused children. Seventy-one and one-half percent of the injuries were not serious, 16.5 percent serious but resulting in no permanent damage, 2.1 percent serious and resulting in permanent damage, and 1.4 percent fatal. The seriousness of 8.5 percent of the injuries was unknown. See Nationwide Epidemiologic Study of Child Abuse, undated progress report covering July 1, 1966 to February 15, 1967 prepared for the U.S. Children's Bureau by Brandeis University, Waltham, Mass., pp. A1-13. [Mimeographed.]

Sixty-four percent of the households in which the abuse incident occurred were headed by fathers, 20 percent by stepfathers, and 12 percent by mothers.

Twenty-seven percent of the abused children were from homes within which both parents were Protestant, 23 percent from homes within which both parents were Catholic, 15 percent the mother Catholic and the religion of the father unknown, and 6 percent from homes within which there was no religious affiliation. One child came from a family within which the mother was Protestant and the father unaffiliated, and another child from a family within which the mother was Catholic and the father Jewish. The religious background of 25 percent of the children was unknown.

By respondent rating, 56 percent of the abused children lived in families which were poor, 39 percent comfortable, none in rich families, and 2 percent in families of unknown socioeconomic status. Eight of the poorer families were known public assistance recipients. The household head in 81 percent of the families was married and living with spouse, 6 percent separated, and 4 percent divorced. The marital status of two household heads was unknown. One of the two remaining household heads was married with a spouse temporarily away, and the other was widowed. Forty-two of the 48 abused children came from families within which there were from one to four other children under 19 years of age.

Circumstances, Extent of Injuries, and Actions Taken

As far as the respondents knew, the incident of child abuse they reported was the first which had ever occurred in 14 percent of the cases. In 60 percent of the cases it was not the first incident. Forty-one percent of the children were abused by their fathers, 31 percent by their mothers, 16 percent by their stepfathers, and 6 percent by some non-related male.

One child was abused by a non-related female and one by a brother. The perpetrators ranged in age from under 20 years to 60: One perpetrator was under 20, 25 percent twenty to 24 years old, 12 percent twenty-five to 29, 25 percent 30 to 34 years old, 14 percent 35 to 39 years old, 4 percent 40 to 44, 4 percent 45 to 49 years, and 4 percent 50 to 59 years old. The age of 8 percent of the perpetrators was unknown. Three (6 percent) of the abused children died, 8 percent suffered permanent damage, and 29 percent incurred serious injury without permanent damage. The majority (50 percent) suffered not very serious, superficial injuries. The nature and extent of injury was not known for 6 percent of the cases.

When confronted by these incidents, 62 percent of the respondents took no action whatsoever. Thirty-five percent, on the other hand, did intervene one way or another.

Thirty-seven percent of the children received medical treatment for their injuries, 45 percent did not, and information was not available for the remaining 16 percent. Seven percent of the children were hospitalized. The incident was reported to a social welfare agency 37 percent of the time, and to a law enforcement agency such as the police, county sheriff, district attorney or court 47 percent of the time. In the 23 cases which were reported to a law enforcement agency, the perpetrator was arrested 43 percent of the time, and came before the court 34 percent of the time. In the 8 cases which came before the court, 2 perpetrators were jailed, 1 put on probation, 1 fined, 1 given a suspended sentence, 1 some other sort of treatment, and information was not available for the two remaining cases.

After the incident 68 percent of the abused children continued to live at home, 24 percent were removed, and information was not available for the remaining 6 percent of the cases.

Summary and Discussion

This survey of a representative sample of the total non-institutional population of the United States, twenty-one years old or older, was designed to obtain information about public knowledge, attitudes and opinions about child abuse in the United States. It was part of a broader program of research into the epidemiology of child abuse conducted by Brandeis University. As such, it conceptualized and defined child abuse as "non-accidental physical attack or physical injury, including minimal as well as fatal injury, inflicted upon children by persons caring for them."

The survey furnished data on public knowledge of the general problem of child abuse and the sources of knowledge. It garnered opinion on what should be done about the child and the perpetrator and about which agency should have primary responsibility for dealing with the problem. Reactions to child abuse in the neighborhood, whether hearsay or witnessed, and knowledge of community resources and their use were ascertained.

It explored how widespread the propensity to child abuse might be in the general population. Opinion about how much publicity child abuse should receive was interpreted as an indication of the extent of public concern. The survey assayed awareness of specific child abuse incidents during the year preceding the survey, the sources of knowledge, and whether the respondents personally knew the families involved. The background characteristics, circumstances, and dispositions of the child and the perpetrator were obtained for incidents involving families of which the respondents had personal knowledge. Finally, an estimate of the upper bound of yearly incidence of child abuse in the United States was presented, together with a caveat on its interpretation and use.

The findings regarding knowledge of child protective agencies in the community merit discussion. Between 48 and 51.2 percent of the total U.S. population lacked knowledge of such agencies. Dwellers in major metropolitan areas, irrespective of education, were least aware. About 38 percent of them knew of child protective agencies in their midst. Clearly, ignorance of these resources and their potential for helping the abused child and his family stands as an obstacle to use. Child protective agencies, especially those located in major metropolitan areas, might well take steps to procure increased recognition of their existence and function. This survey found newspapers and radio and TV the major sources of knowledge about the general problem and specific incidents of child abuse. Consequently, steps to procure increased recognition of the existence and function of child protective agencies should rely heavily upon these effective communications media. One might venture that once increased recognition has been achieved, educational programs and activities sponsored by social service agencies, now so little known and frequented, may attract wider participation.

Public opinion about how widespread the propensity to child abuse may be in the population at large, about appropriate measures for protecting children from further harm, and about proper treatment for perpetrators, suggest a level of understanding and tolerance not shared by some officials and practitioners. Most respondents thought that anybody could at some time injure a child in his care, that the abused child should be removed from his home only as a last resort, and that perpetrators should be closely supervised and treated rather than punished. Unfortunately, official practice all too often considers child abuse extremely deviant, removes the child from his home the first time abuse occurs, and prosecutes

and brands the perpetrator as a criminal. Of course, some instances of child abuse do reflect extreme deviance, require prompt removal of the child from the home to protect him from imminent harm, and constitute such serious and flagrant violations of community norms that criminal prosecution may be necessary.

Central to this discussion, however, should be the recognition that child abuse is not a monolithic phenomenon. And as such, it should not evoke a monolithic response. Physical child abuse may range in severity from a slap mark or bruise to fatality. It seems important, therefore, to retain proper perspective on the phenomenon in face of the glut of recent publicity which child abuse has received---some of it pretty lurid.¹⁹ Publicity meant to gain support for legislation and protective services should guard against intemperance and overstatement, lest it foster unrealistic guilt feelings and punitiveness. Certainly, nobody concerned can profit from a witchhunt. Until more comprehensive data are available on incidence and distribution of child abuse in subsegments of the U.S. population, it would seem wise to hold to the opinion voiced by the majority of respondents in the present survey: Almost anybody at some time could injure a child in his care. Physicians, especially pediatricians, psychiatrists, social workers, marital counselors, and clergymen might well routinely counsel married persons and those contemplating marriage about the stresses and strains associated with the child-caring role and the likelihood that they will be tempted some day to strike out against a child because of frustration and anger.

¹⁹ See, for example, "Children in Hell: Epidemic of Abuse Sweeps the Country," The Charlotte Observer, July 9, 1967. Typically, the more gruesome cases are cited as examples of child abuse and reference made to epidemic proportions of the phenomenon. Later statements, to wit, "such cases are not common, but they are far from rare," both qualify and then disqualify the previous citations. See also The Washington Post, April 30 - May 2, 1967 for a three article series with provocative captions and pictures on child abuse.